

March 2024

Hello,

I write this as we watch the seasons shift, look for glimpses of light and welcome spring. Samlande Tankar/Collecting Thoughts continues, currently with planning this spring's work. I'm primarily focusing on looking back on year 2, reading notes from our expert council meetings and workshops, and reflecting on how the project might be presented this fall. The project's AiR participants, Johnny Chang, Afrang Nordlöf Malekian, and Munish Wadhia, plan on putting together a joint presentation. Some of the most rewarding moments of my work is meeting with these three artists. I appreciate hearing them discuss, think, ask questions, and reach conclusions.

At the last expert council meeting in November, we met at Botkyrka konsthall, a center for contemporary art in Fittja. Curator Anneli Bäckman presented the center's work with Labyrint Press, their own archive of Artist's books consisting of prints, magazines, sculptures, and audio works. The archive, which is constantly growing, contains artists' self-published works as well as works published in collaboration with the center. Botkyrka konsthall also runs its own publishing house with the same name as the archive: Labyrint Press. The archive is open to visitors, who can browse the works or use them as starting points to gather around. "Just" by existing, Labyrint Press has become an accessible resource for potential activities, and a space to enter, both through the publishing house and as an architectural spatiality.

After Anneli's presentation, I conducted a workshop exploring policy documents as political spaces. I split the expert council into three groups and tasked them each with reading a policy on collection and acquisition. After the fire in 2014, Grafikens Hus developed a document to serve as a basis for discussing a possible future collection. In addition to that, I also brought policies from a state-owned art museum and a municipal art museum. The participants discussed how policy documents work both practically and strategically to clarify guidelines, for example about donation requests. The group reading the state-owned art museum's policy document thought it very clearly detailed its work with collection and acquisitions. The institution's vision was well-articulated in the document, which was also being revised once every three years.

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It described what the institution collected, who made decisions about acquisitions, and how the decision-making process worked. However, one expert council participant pointed out, while the document was transparent it didn't disclose the museum's criteria for acquisition – what exactly does its selection group look for and base its decisions on?

The group who read the smaller municipal art museum's policy document found its contents too generic. In its attempt to be broad, the document didn't really say much about the museum's work with collection and acquisition. It wasn't clear how or by whom decisions were made about new acquisitions to the collection. Perhaps the challenge is to formulate a document that is simultaneously broad and reflective of the organization's values and mission?

The workshop participants found that collections serve as foundations for the museums, and that new works are acquired to “complement” the existing collection. Artist in Residence Munish Wadhia commented, “Instead of re-writing history, maybe re-imagine history?” For Grafikens Hus, currently looking ahead at building a collection, the question arises of how such a foundation can be created? This question has been vigorously discussed throughout the project. At the meeting, it led to a debate around the fact that museums use existing ideas as starting points to what a collection should be, reinforcing biases in art history. Artist in Residence Johnny Chang asked, if a museum tells a predetermined story, “What's the starting point then?” Artist in Residence Afrang Nordlöf Malekian commented that Grafikens Hus is “not responsible for stewarding a certain type of history,” and could instead focus on gaps in the history of graphic art, where the very idea of graphics can expand.

Hope you are enjoying the spring sun,

Macarena Dusant

Translation from Swedish by Helga Edström
